

FULLER HOSTS MENTAL ILLNESS AND GUN VIOLENCE CONFERENCE

By Kathleen Piché, L.C.S.W., Public Affairs Director



Over 16 national and local speakers gathered Monday, February 11, at the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, to discuss how communities are facing the challenge of gun violence. The conference was presented by NAMI San Gabriel Valley, Fuller's School of Psychology and Pacific Clinics, and was sponsored by All Saints Episcopal Church, the Pasadena Mental Health Advisory Committee and Peace Over Violence. Entitled *Facing the Crisis: Mental Illness and Gun Violence*, the day began with a welcome from Dr. Wooden Gooden, Dean, Fuller School of Psychology.



Keynote speaker Marvin Southard, D.S.W., LACMDH Director, pointed out the categories we place others in, stressed the need for social inclusion, and highlighted LACMDH's participation in programs with law enforcement, LAUSD, describing the purpose and success of the department's School Threat Assessment and Response Team (START), which provides threat prevention and management services to educational institutions and Federal law enforcement agencies, and is designed to prevent targeted school violence.

Local dignitaries also spoke, including: Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard, Pasadena Police Chief Phillip Sanchez and Pasadena Public Health Director Eric Walsh, M.D., who sees violence as a socially infectious disease. Walsh cited a 2005 Chicago study that concluded those witnessing gun violence are 3-5 times more likely to be violent themselves.

Community based leaders were present as well, including Gunnar Christiansen, M.D., NAMI Director of Faith Outreach, who talked about the problems of stigma related to mental illness; Reverend Ed Bacon, Rector, Pasadena All Saints Episcopal Church, who mentioned his own eight year battle with depression and how it helps him relate to others; and Keris Myrick, Ph.D.c., President, NAMI National, Executive Director, Project Return Peer Support Network, who talked about the contact model to reduce stigma and noted that quality care and access are other areas needing help.



Adding color and a broader view of what it's like to be diagnosed schizophrenic, Dr. Frederick Frese III, Professor of Psychology, Northeast Ohio University College of Medicine, gave the audience a history lesson on mental health and violence and pointed out that a tiny percentage of those diagnosed are dangerous. Dr. Richard Josiassen, Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology, Drexel University, presented a video-taped interview of a man that committed murder due to the psychosis he was experiencing.

Two panels in the afternoon reviewed the mental health crisis in our community and discussed gun violence as a byproduct of a violent culture.

